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ABSTRACT

Two college faculty members share their experiences of the dialogue that has evolved as each woman formed her identity as professor. Both are women who began as junior single faculty members in rural, isolated university communities and became professors at other larger institutions. Their stories tell how they negotiate teaching, research, and service, and how they play integral roles in getting new graduate programs started and adjust to new universities in new settings. These narratives are autobiographical and autoethnographical as they reflect the shaping of the professorial identity. (Contains 26 references.) (SLD)

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Forming and Reforming Identity:
Learning Our Work in Higher Education

By

Sharon L. Spall
Western Kentucky University
Department of Administration, Leadership, and Research
Tate Page Hall, 403 A
1 Big Red Way
Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101
sharon.spall@wku.edu

and

Karen E. Norum
University of Idaho, Boise
College of Education
Adult & Organizational Learning
800 Park Blvd., Suite 200
Boise, ID 83712
knorum@uidaho.edu

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K. Norum

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How does one enter the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) called the "professorate"? What does it mean to become a "professor": a faculty member at a university of higher learning. According to Shoenfeld & Magnan (1994), "As individuals, professors represent scholarly attainment and love of learning" (p. 3). They are people motivated by creativity and curiosity and are devoted to "*the life of the mind*, pledged to defend a climate in which free thought and unconstrained inquiry can flourish" (Shoenfeld & Magnan, p. 3, emphasis in original). The professorate is a community of practice where teachers question students and students question teachers; a profession marked by high standards of initiative and honor (Shoenfeld & Magnan, 1997). Becoming a professor is a journey, not a destination; "an endless and unpredictable dialogue between your own potentialities and the life situations in which you find yourself" (Shoenfeld & Magnan, p. 5). It is the investigation of the endless star (Neruda, 1967).

The faculty member fills the three sided mission of a department: teaching, service, and scholarship (Tierney, 1999; Shoenfeld & Magnan, 1994), and the new faculty member must plan and grow in all three areas of work. David Whyte (2001) defines work in these ways: a pilgrimage of identity; an opportunity for discovering and shaping; a place where self meets the world (pp.3,4). In this place called academe, new people must define their work, form and reform identify, and present self to the world in many forums (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). Much of the work is rooted in the personal (Coles & Knowles) as individuals try to connect fragments of past and present experiences and bring meaning to current life experiences (Howarth, 1980).

In this paper, the two of us share snapshots of the "endless and unpredictable dialogue" that has evolved as we investigate the endless star called "professor." We share our individual yet shared experiences of beginning our work in academe. We both began our journeys as junior single female faculty members in rural, isolated university communities. Summer 2001, we both moved to larger universities in more populous areas. While we hold in common the experience of living and working in similar communities and university settings, because we are two different people in two different settings, our journeys are unique. We share our stories of how we negotiate the sacred triad of teaching, research, and service, play integral roles in getting new graduate programs off the ground, and adjust to new universities in new settings. We share how we have formed our "professor" identities in practice (Wenger, 1998).

An Autoethnographical and Autobiographical Pastiche

The stories presented are both autoethnographical and autobiographical in nature. While our stories are clearly about our personal experiences, they also serve to explore the relationships of ourselves to others and ourselves to the world of higher education (Ellis, 1997; 1999). Our personal experiences illustrate the discovery of self and the understandings of personal and professional connections (Cole & Knowles, 2000). The texts created are agents of self-discovery for both the writer and the reader as connections emerge with the personal and with the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In autoethnography, the writer focuses outward and captures the social and cultural; then the writer focuses inward on the self to emphasize how human experience seeks and is capable of seeking meaning of experience. The site is the personal, reflexive self. Writers

become ethnographers making autobiographical sense of their own lived experiences (Richardson, 1995). Such stories provide a vicarious experience to the reader and change the degree of emphasis on process, culture, and self. The autoethnographer writes of lived experience, self and culture, and the autobiographer writes within a historical frame of events and specific dates (Ellis & Bochner, 1992).

Autobiography springs from the category of narrative research of personal experience (Casey, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Such narratives tell stories of past events, but add the significance of the present self-consciousness (Gusdorf, 1980; Polkinghorne, 1991). As an autobiographer, the writer steps back and takes a second look at an experience from the aerial view given by the passage of time and the locus of the present (Olney, 1972; Spall, 2000). Polkinghorne (1995) writes that the value of autobiographical research is determined by the coherence of the told data and the explanatory power of the story. Such a story should have the capacity to provide readers with insight and understanding.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call fragments of personal experience pulled together for meaningful explanations of self and life autobiography or research text. The research text or autobiography may be analyzed for patterns of meaning. Also, the autobiographical text may be the way personal experience data is represented. There are no general rules for the way autobiographical data should be represented. The autobiography could be a poem or song. There are "... no boundaries or restraints of how to translate one's life into text" (Olney, 1972, p. 3).

This description offered by Olney relates to Eisner's ideas of arts-based representation of data (1997). Eisner's ideas on alternative representation of data

correspond to Olney's thoughts of autobiographical expression. The writer defines self and a personal experience in a special way to readers. Readers gain new insight that may advance human understanding through the special way the experience is represented (Eisner, 1997, p. 5).

A variety of forms will be employed throughout this paper to tell our story(s). Autobiographical and autoethnographical narrative, vignettes, fiction, and poetry will be used to create a "pastiche": a variety of selections stitched together to communicate particular messages above and beyond the individual selections (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). We use different forms and page layouts to illustrate different ways of knowing or coming to know (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997) as well as evoke certain messages and emotions (Norum, 2000a, b). The pastiche allows us to share different perspectives and interpretations of experiences while crafting a coherent whole.

Whyte (2001) states, "Life is a creative, intimate and unpredictable conversation...and our *life* and our *work* are both the result of the particular way we hold that passionate conversation" (p. 6, emphasis in the original). He refers to our work as a pilgrimage of identity. It is our hope that the story(s) shared convey the complex, non-linear, and labyrinthine path to forming and reforming identity in the pilgrimage to becoming one who professes.

The Meeting of Fellow JourneyWomen

"So, how many grocery stores are there in Nacogdoches?" Sharon laughs at the question and we begin comparing our rural university communities. (Nacogdoches has

four AND a Walmart; Vermillion has two and a Pamida.) It is January 1998; we are on our way to QUIG (Qualitative Research in Education). We find we hold much in common: both single, no children but we do have pets; new to the professorate; both involved in shaping new graduate programs; first time either of us has attended QUIG; we share a strong interest in qualitative research methods. Our paths to the professorate differ. One came from the corporate setting to a tenure-track position while the other came from a K-12 setting and began her path in a non-tenure-track position.

Sharon's Department Chair and Karen's colleague is who brought us together: Patrick sent proposals to QUIG and AERA bearing all of our names. We will be presenting together later in the Spring in San Diego. A bond develops between us and by the time QUIG ends, we are making plans to go the zoo while we're in San Diego. This bond has continued to strengthen as we learn from each other and support one another in our journeys to become those who profess.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

We begin the story(s) of our journeys from reflective stances. Sharon begins by reflecting on the opportunities she had at Stephen F. Austin State University. Karen begins with the third year of her time in academe. Both stories beg the question of what is really important in this pilgrimage? Glimpses of what is and was important to both of us in forming and reforming our identities as professors are provided in the pages that follow.

Sharon's Reflection: Small University, BIG Opportunities

Being at the right place at the right time offered opportunities that have shaped my personal and professional life. At Stephen F. Austin, I was trying to juggle all the teaching, committee work, and writing. The full professors said that it was possible to do everything: focus on issues which developed out of the dissertation, try to interrelate activities, and stay up very late. All my days were the same: get up, go to the office (write, work collaboratively on committees, teach and/or develop my research). Somehow, I needed some balance for my personal life and my professional life, or maybe it was all the same. I was working too fast and too hard to be sure.

In the last five years there were highly exhilarating times and deeply sad times with few times that were neutral. One thing was true for me: If my world of work became too frustrating or relationship problems develop, stop. Time cures most ills. Everything seemed to change quickly in higher education. I am not sure why. Faculty left and new faculty arrived. Adjustments at the college and university level trickled down to impact work at the department. Waiting and watching before making an impulsive decision or comment opened doors for me in a small university with big opportunities.

However, those doors beckoned me beyond this small university. Forces were at work; personal and professional forces that would soon collide and move me forward.

Karen's Lessons of ex/ins piration

My father used to say, "If you want to dance, you have to pay the fiddler." By Spring semester 2000, I had been dancing with the University of South Dakota Coyotes

almost three years. It was taking a toll on me emotionally (I really did not like living on the prairie) and intellectually (like golf or quilting are some people's "bliss," mine is writing and I had writer's block). On May 1, 2000, the burn out I thought I might be imagining manifested itself physically. It came time to pay the fiddler.

I'd just returned from the American Educational Research Association Meeting in New Orleans. Today (Monday), I had my last class meeting for the semester in Sioux Falls (one hour away). I had come down with a bad cold. "I just have to get through class tonight, THEN I can be sick for a few days." But not many—I was starting summer courses on the heels of the Spring semester. I always taught my summer classes in May and June, strategizing that if I did get to move off the prairie, I could fulfill my summer teaching obligations and still move to a new location without being pressured. Of course, at this point, it looked like I would be spending another year in exile on the prairie.

That Monday, I was convinced I had a bad cold and with a good rest in the morning, I could get through this last night of class. I rested until about noon, then figured the steam from the shower would improve what had become labored breathing. To my surprise, the steam from the shower almost suffocated me. Something was very wrong. I called the doctor's office—she could see me in about 30 minutes. "But if your breathing gets worse, don't wait for your appointment here—go to the ER." Strange advice for someone who just has a bad cold.

I dressed as if I was going to Sioux Falls for class and went to the doctor's office. By the time I arrived, I was wheezing. Once my breathing was under control, I felt much better. The doctor listened to my lungs and announced, "You have pneumonia."

"Pneumonia?!" I exclaimed incredulously. "I had sniffles on Saturday. How could I have pneumonia on Monday?"

"That's one of the signs of pneumonia," the doctor explained.

"Well I have class in Sioux Falls tonight."

Now it was the doctor's turn to be incredulous. "You are NOT going to Sioux Falls tonight! You're going to the pharmacy and then home. You have a secretary who can contact the students and cancel class, don't you?"

"Yes," a small voice replied (knowing full well that I intended to go into the office and contact the students myself. That would be much faster than trying to tell the secretary where the contact information was and besides, having been gone a week, there would be numerous fires to attend to—there always were when you'd been gone). "But what about work?" I asked.

"I know it's tough, being the end of the semester, but if you want to get well with no complications, rest is critical. You really shouldn't work at all this week but if you feel you must, limit your activity to 2 hours a day. That goes for next week too." ("Activity" included grocery shopping, laundry, and all those other things we do to take care of our lives.) "And I need to see you back here tomorrow."

By the end of that week, I accepted that I really did have pneumonia. It would be six weeks before I would return to a full-time work schedule. In the mean time, I would spend many hours on the sofa, resting my way back to health. I spent the next couple of weeks trying to wrap up the Spring semester and begin Summer classes working in two-hour increments per day. Working in two-hour increments forced me to decide what was really important. What was important to get done for the next day; what was important in

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academic life for a junior professor on the tenure track; what was important to my quality of life?

Two major lessons emerge from the next few weeks of recovery. They are lessons of expiration and inspiration. The lesson of expiration is that even though I've known for quite a while that there is a very good chance I will not live forever, being this ill raised questions of what happens if I'm ever so sick I cannot take care of myself? Being single, I don't have anyone to take care of me. Married friends pointed out that in some ways, it's no different for them: they don't necessarily see themselves as obligated to playing the role of home health care provider for one another. At the same time, I realized I needed to have a plan for what happens if I'm unable to work for a significant period of time.

During those weeks, each time I had class, I was continually amazed at how energized I was by the end of it. Each time it happened, I was surprised it had happened again. It slowly dawned on me that the students literally inspired me. New life was breathed into me through our interactions. A palpable energy field was created and it fed me. I was infused with energy I physically did not have going into the class. That was the lesson of inspiration.

I learned a third lesson as well. I could not stay in South Dakota much longer. When people asked me, my standard reply had become, "I really like what I'm doing but don't want to do it South Dakota." My very soul was experiencing damage. Perhaps the pneumonia was the culmination of feeling in discord with my environment. Perhaps this was the wake-up call I needed to realize I was out of context (and it wasn't simply my imagination).

How We Entered the Professorate

Karen's Story: From Mountains to Prairie

Scarlett O'Hara was told she drew her strength from the red earth of Tara (Mitchell, 1936). I was afraid I drew my strength from the majestic Rocky Mountains. What would it be like to live in rural, flat, South Dakota? Truth be known, had I looked at the map before applying for this position, I wouldn't have applied. (Vermillion is a community of approximately 10,000, situated on the prairie where South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa come together.) But the position had my name all over it—a School of Education looking for someone with an organizational theory background, from a non-school setting. It is an opportunity to shape a brand new graduate program from the ground up; one that may not come my way again. I desperately want to leave my corporate training position for academia and it is already May. Where else am I going to go for the Fall? Yes, it means leaving my beloved Rocky Mountains and the dry, semi-desert climate I have come to love. True, to go from living in Denver for fifteen years to a rural prairie town is going to be a culture shock. What will Sundays be like without the Bronco's—will I even get to watch their games? But if I want to enter academia... I suppose I can stand South Dakota for a couple of years. Maybe it won't be so bad. How often had I gone skiing or gotten up to the mountains in the last five years anyway while I was working on my doctorate? So, I won't see the mountains daily. I imagine I will be so busy as a new professor in a new graduate program that I won't have much time to notice the landscape.

Two weeks later the offer comes. I don't have to think about it—it's accepted and I can announce my resignation at my current job. What a relief to know I'm out of there! My house sells within twenty-four hours of going on the market. I soon discover that finding acceptable housing in Vermillion is a challenge. Rentals are set up for the students. Furthermore, while they'll rent to undergrads who will most likely trash the place, very few places will allow pets—go figure—and I have a cat. It is also all overpriced. I resign myself to renting an apartment at what appears to be the only complex (if you can call it that—25 apartments total) that allows pets and does NOT rent to undergrads. When I arrive in Vermillion and begin to interact with my new colleagues, one of the first things they ask is if I was able to find decent housing.

Sharon's Story: Small Town, Small University, BIG Opportunity

Considering the numerous isolated, rural areas across America, there must be many small towns with a university central to the geographic region as well as to the community and lives of the people. In what is now my university town, the residential areas, the businesses, and the university are all situated around and between two major streets and both streets run north and south. It is larger than the nearby one-stop-light town, and there are several lights on each street. Fast food restaurants and motels line each side of one street and the post office and banks are on the other street. There is a loop around the town to route the lumber trucks, which carry the region's primary resource, pine logs. Giant pine logs that resemble future telephone poles are stacked high on the logger trucks, but some will become lumber at the sawmills. A red cloth hangs from the longest log: "Drivers behind beware."

The isolation characterizes the area. The nearest community with a population of more than 2,000 is one hour away. Cities with populations over 40,000 are more than two hours away. The pine forests that surround the area contribute to an insular feeling between this community and communities beyond the forest.

Just to give a perspective regarding the size of my university town, I should provide some referents regarding the local culture. This university town of approximately 32,000 has four grocery stores, two on each of the major streets. I have trimmed down my exotic tastes and find the brands adequate. Persons living here must be satisfied with Walmart, JC Penny, Bealls, and Sears for all basic items such as shoes and clothing.

Local sports highlight the evening news. Occasionally, a criminal act will shadow the sports. Personally, I hate missing the weather portion, which charts the fronts moving from west to east and becomes an important event of my evening. For entertainment, there is one bowling alley and a six-screen cinema, which never gets foreign films or even films such as "Evita," but the film about cheerleaders ("Bring it on") stayed for four weeks. There is a two-screen, dollar cinema. All titles stay at the six screen for at least two weeks, so most desperate people are probably seeing films for the second and third time at the dollar show.

Now, you can create your own entertainment: biking, hiking, fishing, boating, golfing, and visits with friends. Health clubs are big. Some people find that strolling through Walmart provides entertainment. Here is an opportunity to chat with others who are shopping at this one-stop-get-it -all-here store or who are also strolling. There's lots to see here: rotisserie chicken sizzling on the spit, cheese from Mexico, new bakery items,

fresh bread, sale items, new video releases, and the list of sights goes on. A trip to Walmart can provide a full afternoon of diversion.

The people are very friendly and helpful in a way that can only be found in a small community. Although I have been in Texas for 20 years, I still must wear the sign of foreigner because I am recognized quickly. "You are not from here are you?" There are others like me, and most of us are connected to the university, but we are outnumbered everywhere by local people.

The university has prepared teachers for the schools in the region and prepared persons for professions in the business, agricultural, and medical fields. I am always impressed with how professionals in the area are willing to volunteer time to visit our university classrooms and serve on committees. The question is never, "What must I do?" The question is, "When do you want me there?" People appear to share an ownership of the university. Such a view of the university provides many kinds of support, but this view can also slow positive change and promote the attitude: "This is the way things were when I went to school at SFA." and "This is the way things are done here."

This is the context within which I began a new career upon accepting a Visiting Professor position at Stephen F. Austin State University.

Forming Identity: Learning Our Work in Higher Education

We had both started new careers at state universities in small, rural, isolated communities. While we bore the title of "professor," it took some time to feel like "those who profess." Our personal and professional identities were being re-formed.

Sharon's Formation: Earning a Doctorate and Becoming an Assistant Professor

"Hello, Dr. Spall!" I can remember the professors who were my teachers during doctoral studies saying those words after my defense. The chair of my dissertation committee recommended, "Participate in the graduation ceremony. The experience gives closure to your doctoral study." For the last three graduations I had been a student volunteer at graduation, and my plan had always been to "walk." The advice to participate in graduation as closure hung heavy in the air for a moment. Doctoral study had ended; the job search began.

My preoccupation with the June dissertation defense and an August graduation put me at a disadvantage for finding a position in higher education. Late in August, I accepted a position as Visiting Professor at a small, regional state university located in an isolated, rural area. This position gave me teaching experience and provided a reference for a tenure-track position in the future.

The months that followed were full of first's for me as "Doctor": first semester, first courses, first students, first committee work, and first writing projects. The faculty involved the visiting as well as tenure-track assistant professors immediately in all phases of the department. The first semester ended and the second began. I continued to teach new courses for the first time, but now the assignments were off campus and as far as two hours away. I almost felt as if I had become an assistant professor in higher education. I was as exhausted as other professors, but the full realization of my new role had not evolved.

The transformation occurred at June graduation. For the first time, I wore the robe for my students rather than as a student myself. I watched the graduates "walk" who were the students that I had helped prepare for this closure experience. It was at that moment that I felt as if I became an assistant professor. I saw the smiling faces of the students in their caps and gowns as I represented the university and our department: I felt a part of the effort that brought them to this public ceremony that recognized their achievement. This was a good feeling, even without a tenure-track position. That would happen later.

Karen's Formation

Two Vignettes

Vignette One: Fall 1997

We are sitting in Dan's office, comparing our ideas for the instructional design class. Dan, Celina, and I are all new professors. Dan will be teaching the instructional design class with some help from Celina this Fall. We each bring expertise in instructional design and I may be teaching the class at some point so we are trying to collaborate on what the class should/might look like.

"Excuse me, Doctor Byers?" It's Jim, one of our graduate assistants. He is busy setting up our office computers.

Dan, Celina, and I look at each other, baffled. Then it dawns on Celina, "OH! You mean me!"

Vignette Two: Fall 1998

Despite my instructions to the contrary, the students on campus seem to insist on calling me "Dr." I've come to expect it and after a year of being referred to enough times as "Dr. Norum" in the classroom, in my office, or in the campus buildings, I know who they are referring to.

9 PM Sunday evening: the phone rings. I'm working on my computer at home, getting ready for my Monday night class.

"Hello."

"Yes, may I speak to Dr. Norum, please?" Who is that, I wonder. Do they have the wrong number? Then with a start, I say, "OH! Yes, this is Dr. Norum!"

It is a student from my Monday night class calling to let me know he's been called out of town on a business trip and will have to miss class.

"You're the first student to ever call me at home," I apologetically explain to excuse my hesitancy in answering the phone. My identity

as a "professor" is being reified.

Old Main

Pink brick, polished wood
Marble floors, ivory tower
Green shades, grand staircases
High ceilings, authentic blackboards

Animated discussions
Theorizing, philosophizing
Challenging, learning
Journeys into other disciplines

The essence of academia
Enlivened again
In this newly restored building
This symbol of "higher" education

When I'm in Old Main
I FEEL like a Professor
It envelops me
I relish in its embrace

Negotiating the Sacred Triad: Teaching, Research, and Service

We quickly learned that teaching, research, and service comprise the sacred triad of practices in the community called the professorate (Shoenfeld & Magnan, 1994; Tierney, 1999; Wenger, 1998). The successful negotiation of this sacred triad culminates in the tenure-and-promotion ritual. In our journeys to become professors, we each learn, experience, and negotiate this triad differently.

Sharon's Negotiating Strategies

Initially, I came to SFA as a Visiting Professor fresh from my doctoral studies in educational administration at a large, research oriented university. Previous to my

doctoral studies, I had been a teacher, reading consultant, central office coordinator, and assistant principal in public schools in five different states. Even though I was a full-time student and a research assistant, I did not fully comprehend the life lived by the university faculty member. If I had any glamorous ideas about the professorate of academia, the realities of teaching, service, and scholarly work during my first year in higher education soon dispelled such an illusion. This was a career change from my public school experience to a rigorously disciplined way of life in higher education.

This small community and small university always provided opportunities for professional growth. As I examine the last five years, this growth could be divided into three phases: Entry, Dynamo and Super Dynamo. This first phase, the "Entry Phase," introduced me to higher education. The Visiting Professor position was called by one of my former doctoral professors "breaking into higher education from public school." Such an entry is not always easy, especially if you are bound to a geographic region. I was just plain lucky to be available when this position came open. The first semester was exciting because everything was new, but this was the honeymoon given to new people to facilitate the adjustment. Second semester, I was preparing for a new set of classes, traveling two hours to an off-campus site, and teaching on Sunday. Additionally, student enrollment in each class numbered over 40.

When I was not traveling, I was expected to hold office hours to advise students and complete committee work. The culture of the department and the culture that was modeled by the senior female faculty members demanded that I be in my office. Because my schedule included Sunday, I had a six-day week. By the end of the summer, the glow of this opportunity became shaded by my exhaustion. I was asked. "What do you teach?"

My answer was, "What I am told to teach." I began to feel as if I had no control over my life. I appeared for class and taught, appeared at the office and advised, and appeared at committee meetings and did what was needed. Everything was pre-decided and predetermined. I mechanically filled the slot. During the second fall, I began looking for another position, because this opportunity became overwhelmingly oppressive. However, a new opportunity gave me courage to regroup and remain, which ushered in the next phase.

The "Dynamo Phase" began when our faculty wrote a proposal for the doctoral program and our work took off in an electrically charged way. The assistant professors (including me) facilitated the development of the goals, objectives, and courses during a two-day retreat. After the retreat, the Department Chair decided to list me as one of the doctoral faculty for the proposal. This was primarily because I was freshly out of doctoral work and (again) available. Events began happening very quickly. New professors with experience chairing dissertation committees were hired. As doctoral faculty, we began refining the proposal to address the demands from the Higher Education Coordinating Board. As part of the doctoral faculty, I participated in the development of a new doctoral program: writing syllabi, writing course descriptions, designing and implementing the interview process for the selection of doctoral students, and beginning the first doctoral cohort. In the midst of all this intense work, a tenure-track position opened for an assistant professor in the doctoral program. I had been working with the program on a Visiting Professor status; I applied, was interviewed, and offered the position. I became a tenure-track assistant professor helping to develop and implement a new doctoral program. My last phase began, the Super Dynamo phase.

The Super Dynamo phase was hyper charged and characterized by stimulating colleagues and more new experiences. Some of the doctoral faculty resigned, so the faculty that remained continued to maintain and to develop the program. Search committees had to be chaired, classes taught, and the next cohort selected. Our new chair, who was the director of the doctoral program, provided leadership for teaching and scholarship as well as created opportunities for service within and outside the department. Our chair became a model and our advisor for increased scholarship. Meanwhile, the doctoral faculty began presenting together and collaborating with all department faculty to present at national and regional research conferences. Curriculum committees in all the department programs rewrote and revised goals, objectives, and syllabi. I served on committees across programs as well as the doctoral program. All department programs hired new faculty, and very few persons remained from the group who I had worked with as a Visiting Professor.

The new faculty members brought new energy and new ideas. At the same time, our chair continued to create new learning experiences for us. For example, the chair and the faculty developed two journals, and I served on the editorial staff of one. The routine responsibilities with the newly added projects and new people resulted in an intense work pace. My colleagues and I ask each other, "Is the pace like this at other universities? Is it like this only here because of new programming and new people?" As one task is completed, two more seem to take its place. The learning curve is high for all of us and the level of departmental and individual activity continues to soar.

Interrupted Elation

By Karen E. Norum

Teaching

A new program: craft your curriculum, dream up your courses!

Will you teach (*take a deep breath*)

Days, evenings, weekends, on-campus, off-campus?

Using distance technologies (with no support or release time)?

Summer? Small classes? Large classes?

An overload (with people on sabbatical and all)? (*Exhale*)

Say "yes"—you're not yet tenured

Research

Professional development: Present, write, and publish!

Will you (*take a deep breath*)

Craft a presentation for _____ conference?

Turn that presentation into a publication?

Write (between teaching and service, on your own time)?

Try to find and apply for grant money? (*Exhale*)

Say "yes"—you're not yet tenured

Service

Pick a committee, any committee!

Will you (*take a deep breath*)

Help the Department? School? University?

Review journal manuscripts and conference proposals?

Organize a first-time international conference?

Develop the portfolio assessment process for us? (*Exhale*)

Say "yes"—you're not yet tenured

Is it like this everywhere? I swear, this damn prairie drains me

Karen's Negotiating Strategies

I was elated to be actually working in academia—even if it was on the South Dakota prairie. I could not have asked for a better first position in higher education. It was exciting and challenging to be creating the curriculum for a new graduate program. I had colleagues I enjoyed being with and mutually respected. My Division Chair was a gifted mentor to his crew of junior faculty. The students enjoyed my classes and I enjoyed them. That I had made the right move (to academia) was confirmed for me when a Native American student in a Spring 1999 class gave me the Lakota name of Wopila

Tonka: Special Teacher and Leader. At that moment, I wept with the privilege of doing what I was doing, even if it was in rural South Dakota.

The elation of becoming a member of the community of practice called the professorate was interrupted for me by institutional constraints. Being part of a new graduate program meant constantly monitoring the numbers to see if we had enough students to run our classes. It meant getting creative in scheduling and being willing to teach off-site (either physically or through the use of distance technologies). Institutional constraints also come in the form of the politics of higher education: we spent our first year as a new division just trying to get our Master's and Specialist degrees approved by the School of Education and another year rewriting and revising the proposal seeking the blessing of the Board of Regents. What should have been a "slam-dunk" turned into a grueling, de-energizing process. Then there is the constraint (real or imagined) that when you are on the track to tenure, to get tenured, you best say "yes" to anything and everything you are asked to do. Finally, there is the constraint of tenure: I wondered if I would just be so worn out by the time I was tenured that I would be tempted to sit back on my laurels and become one of "them."

The Trappings of Tenure
By Karen E. Norum

They sat there, in their trappings of tenure, demanding she explain her inspiration.
 "We expect you won't be pulling such a stunt once you are tenured!"
 How should she reply? She in fact fully did intend to "pull such a stunt" even once she was tenured.

Sitting there, on their laurels, they chided her.
 "You understand once you are tenured you don't have to do anything (to speak of)?"
 How should she respond? Dare she tell them how sad and empty such a future appeared to her?

They each pulled at their badges of honor, earned by "updating" their syllabi by merely changing the dates.

"You want one of these, don't you?"
 How to hide her disgust? She most certainly did NOT want to earn one of those!

Each fingered their rings of mediocrity. "Why is it we never hear you ordering bubble sheets for tests?"

They pulled on their glasses. "And why is it we never hear you speaking of having to prepare lectures?"

How could she tell them learning was not a spectator sport in her mind?

They stood up and moved behind the podiums.
 "You do want your own trappings of tenure, don't you? You want to be able to sit back on your laurels and relax, don't you? Well then, remember: we don't get inspired anymore!"

Was it inevitable? Would she too become
 trapped
 by the trappings of tenure?

Reforming Identity and Re-Learning Our Work in Higher Education

"I have learned from interruptions and improvised from the materials that came to hand, reshaping and reinterpreting" (Bateson, 1990, p. 237). According to Whyte (2001), work is a pilgrimage of identity, an opportunity for discovering and shaping. It is the place where self meets the world. Our selves met the world of academe in rural, isolated

communities. Over the years as we shared how we were learning our work with one another, we also reflected on the opportunities we were afforded; opportunities that allowed us to define our work and our identities. At the same time, we shared how we were both feeling a need to move on. Summer 2001 brought turning points in both of our journeys as we were propelled forward to new challenges.

Sharon's Professional Affirmation

The decision to move to another university began to form in my mind two years prior to my actual move. During this two-year period several forces within me and from my surroundings influenced my thinking. As I mentioned before, I came to my first university as a visiting professor. At this time, the majority of the faculty members were full and associate levels. At this time, the department chair hired the visiting professors, and some of the faculty members commented that persons (such as myself) were, therefore, "pushed" or forced upon the faculty without consent. The three years as a visiting professor was actually a closely-observed, long-term interview. But even as I taught the required class load, produced scholarly work, and provided service to student organizations, I never forgot the comment. In my mind being the incumbent and the only applicant for the tenure-track position, I was perhaps still forced upon the faculty.

With this thought always in the back of my mind, I worked long hours and contributed as much as possible to justify my presence and worth. In addition to this pressure, the assistant professor status in the midst of the higher-ranked, tenured faculty members placed additional requirements for professional survival. Then the leadership in the department changed. The absence of a creative inspirational force for developing

curriculum, planning research, writing for publication, and sharing our work provided the impetus for me to seek other employment. At the same time, my parents became ill, and I decided that a position near my family should be obtained immediately.

At times, I wavered: "This may not be the right time. I should chair at least one doctoral dissertation. Perhaps, this new chair will work out." When the interviews came, I found an associate position nearer the home of my parents. In the interview, the faculty members asked questions that I easily answered. "What do you think is the most important class for doctoral students?" This question opened the door for a conversation about the purpose of doctoral study. When everyone listened and then added ideas, I felt affirmed as a professional and worthy of the position. My experiences with research course work, doctoral program planning, and doctoral students coincided with the needs of the department. During the interview, I became convinced that I would make a positive contribution. More importantly, the faculty expressed this to me.

I accepted the associate position and never looked back. The recently reorganized department had experienced persons in higher education who were tenured, but all were assistant or associate status. We began working together to restructure the doctoral program, plan for a NCATE visit, and expand existing programs. My previous experience with all these kinds of projects supported departmental goals. My colleagues welcomed my assistance and comments. Now I do not feel pressure to validate my existence, but I am challenged to sustain my goals and to contribute. This new place, these new people, this new associate position shaped my work and my thinking about what I do and what I think. As I reflect over the past thirty years of my life, changes have always been good for me. As I learn about the new place, I learn the new ways of the organizations and the

people there, and at the same time I bring my ideas forward. Because of this most recent change experience, I am different. I can say: "I have learned, I am learning, and I contribute." This self knowledge has encouraged me to extend my research and professional work. I have had a positive professional growth experience, which only the move to another place and position made possible.

Karen's Change of Context

I desperately needed to get off the prairie. My experience with pneumonia made that crystal clear. Although I had made the right move to academe, South Dakota was not the right place for me. The prairie was sucking the life out of me. I now knew that I was not one of those people who could live anywhere as long as she loved what she was doing. Context mattered to me!

Summer 2001 brought a change of context.

The Day Before a Holiday

It was 5:30 PM CST on July 3, 2001. The day before a holiday. It would be 3:30 PM PST at the University of Idaho in Moscow, ID. The day before a holiday.

"Surely they will have to call the person they want to offer the position to today if they intend to tell the other candidate she didn't get the position by the end of the week. Surely they would have called by now. It's the day before a holiday. I'm sure they've taken care of business by now." My heart sank as I convinced myself I would be getting the "Yes-you-can-walk-on water-but-we're-not-sure-you-can-turn-it-into-wine-and-we-think-the-other-person-can" call after July 4. But it felt so right—the position, the people, the location were all a match. I'd waited—patiently—for SO long to get off the prairie. It

had taken four years for this near perfect position to appear. I had come so close to escaping the prairie—the prairie that was sucking my life energy away. I felt it slowly seeping away each day. The interview in Boise had surged new life into me—for a brief, shining moment. But now my wracking sobs matched my breaking heart. I was doomed to exile on the prairie for yet another year.

Then, at 6 PM CST, the phone rang! Could it be? I quickly blew my nose, wiped my tears, and tried not to sound too deranged as I answered the phone. It was the Division Chair! Calling to release me from the prairie with an offer of the Adult Education position at the U of I! “Before we even talk details, the answer is YES!! I accept!!!!” Thus began a new chapter in my life; a new facet added to my identity as a “professor.”

It's a Nice Fantasy, But...October 2001

If someone would have told me a year ago that I would be sitting in a ski lodge at Sun Valley, ID at a jazz festival because I HAD to be there for a late fall conference, I would have replied, “That’s a nice fantasy, but those kinds of positions don’t exist.”

The scenic drive to Sun Valley had taken me along the Ponderosa Pine Route, then through the Sawtooth National Forest, following the “River of No Return” (the Salmon River). Every fiber of my being had sung with pure joy as the Sawtooth Mountains rose before me. I drank the scene in to the core of my being. How good it was to be back in mountain country! I don’t care what they say—context matters! I had already been healing from “prairie damage” and the trip to Sun Valley only served to speed my recovery.

It was confirmed: Scarlett O'Hara may have drawn her strength from the red earth of Tara; I drew mine from the mountains. "There is something magical and deeply spiritual about places like this for me" I thought as I took advantage of Sun Valley's ice rink late that Sunday afternoon, getting a skate in before meeting my new colleagues for dinner. "How privileged I am!" I exclaimed to myself as I considered how different my life was now that was at the University of Idaho—Boise. Besides the location, where earlier in the fall I had made a weekend habit of biking the greenbelt with the Boise River on one side and the Boise Front (the low mountains) on the other, I had fantastic colleagues and wonderful students who made me "want to be a better professor" (like Helen Hunt made Jack Nicholson want to be a better man in *As Good as it Gets*). Although new too, the Division Director had quickly earned my respect and admiration (as he had seemed to have won from the rest of the faculty). My colleague in Boise had been there several years and was a more than willing mentor, sounding board, and friend. From my experience in South Dakota, I knew the value of good colleagues and had the good fortune to trade one good set for another. As I ended my time on the ice, I rejoiced. Life wasn't perfect—Idaho's higher education system had its budget problems and academic life was going to be challenging for a while. But it would be much easier to endure those difficulties here than on the prairie.

When I met my colleagues for dinner, I thanked them profusely for hiring me. "Thank you for coming" was their heartfelt response.

When I in awesome wonder consider
Where I am,

Who I'm with,
What I'm doing

I imbibe inspiration
My soul sings

Released from the prairie
Re energized
Re invigorated
Re searched

I imbibe inspiration
My soul sings

Another facet of the endless star we call the professorate is unveiling itself

New Chapters, New Facets: Becoming One Who Professes

We have started new chapters in the forming and reforming of our identities as assistant professors. We are learning our work again and assessing where we are in our respective journeys. New facets of identity are being developed as we write.

Karen's Assessment: It Becomes You

Wasn't it stunning—the deep purple velvet cloak, displayed prominently in the store window?! It absolutely took my breath away! Mind you, I'd been shopping for THE cloak for some time now. I'd seen pretty ones, ugly ones, cheap ones, designer ones; cloaks made of wool, soft fleece, portuguese flannel, fine silk, faux fur; cloaks in every color of the rainbow. This one stopped me in my tracks. I stood transfixed before the window.

It was SO gorgeous! Did I dare go in and check the price? I bet it's expensive—out of my price range. Oh, but it's SO pretty—it even has the detail none of

the others had—the golden scrolling ribbon outlining the hood, hem, and neck opening. But if I go in, I know I'll want to try it on. If it's not too big or too small, then I'll be tempted to buy it and I really should be watching my budget. Then again, I've been cloak-shopping for a while now (seems like forever), and I haven't seen one quite like this. What if I don't come across another one? It is beautiful...could I really pull off wearing it? I might look pretty ridiculous.

Uh oh! Someone's in the shop, looking at my cloak—quite seriously. I hold my breath. Good! They're walking away. Whew! That was close. I can't let it get away. What could it hurt to go in and try it on? I enter the store...

1994

Scott leans back in his chair, and with that grin of his, announces, "Well Karen, you got the only 'A'." I laugh and say, "OK, really, what did I get?" It was my first attempt at writing something for potential publication and I was sure Scott (my professor) would tear it apart. After all, most of the rest of the students were full-fledged doctoral students who had done this before. I, on the other hand, had spent as much time learning APA-Style as writing the content of my paper. Surely, it needed a lot of work to be publication caliber.

Scott straightens in his chair, wipes the grin off his face, and says, "No, Karen, I gave you the only 'A'." I was stunned. How could I have possibly gotten the only "A" when this was my first attempt? "What did I do that no one else did?" I ask incredulously. "Well, you can write and you can think." "Can't everyone do that?" "Oh, you'd be surprised. Some can write and some can think, but not everyone can do both."

I'd gone in the store and tentatively tried on that gorgeous cloak of scholarship. With a few minor alterations, it was going to fit just fine. "It becomes you," said the professors who supported my pursuit of a doctorate.

2000

October

I've been working on developing a new model for instructional design. The Spring before, my instructional design class helped in developing the new model; now it was time to present our work at a conference. Lauren is the only one who can actually attend the conference and present with me. It is her first academic conference. We have revised her class project to make it into a professional paper presentation, suitable for publication if she wants to submit it to the ERIC Database. I've shared with her what an academic conference is like. We meet the first day of the conference to discuss our upcoming presentation and iron out last minute details. We attend some of the same sessions; I introduce her to some of my colleagues. The next day, our presentation has a disappointing turn out, but the people who do come are quite interested in what we have to share. Lauren enjoys her first academic conference. When she finishes her Master's degree in the Spring, she just might get serious about pursuing a doctorate. I hope she does—she can write and she can think.

December

I am grading projects from my Fall classes. I tell my students they need to write to understand—it is a method of inquiry—and they will do a fair amount of writing in my classes. Of course, then I get to read it all. I find that some of them can think, but need to improve their writing skills while some can write, but could stand to be more thoughtful about what they are writing. There is one particular Master's degree student who seems to have come alive with curiosity about chaos and complexity theory. He would hardly call himself a scholar and in fact, refers to himself as the "teacher's worst nightmare" when he was in high school and college. But this guy can put ideas together and write fluently about them. Throughout the semester, I witnessed him wrestling through the concepts we are studying, searching and re-searching. One night in class, he casually asked a question about pursuing a doctorate.

The feedback I find myself writing on his project: "You could be doctoral material if you want to be. You can think and you can write."

That beautiful deep purple velvet cloak with the golden scrolling ribbon trim has become a favorite of mine and is now a wardrobe staple. I wear it often and generally get compliments when I do. Sometimes, I let others try it on so they can see if they'd like to

invest in one of their own. My cloak cost a bit more than I was prepared to spend—it stretched my budget. But it was an investment I've never regretted.

The cloak of scholarship—it becomes me.

Sharon's Assessment: A Celebration of Life—What is really important?

My aging parents and their needs have caused me to consider and reconsider my professional goals. A call in the middle of the night, and the wild drive to the hospital intensive care unit reduces the importance of some things and values others. I am fortunate that there has been time to ask: "What is important?" and then time to act upon my answer.

A little about my family and me will be necessary here. I am the older child of two, and the child who moved far away from home to work, marry, divorce, and study. Because I am the oldest and because I lived far away my relationship with my parents has been different than their relationship with my younger sister (something that is a bit of a problem for her). I did things first and negotiated the boundaries for life outside the family. When I moved away, my visits were not the few hours on a weekend, but days and weeks when I lived with my parents. As an adult, I traveled home on most vacations and lived in their home. These were important times for us. Sometimes I arrived exhausted from my work and life's problems. Their home and relationship were my shelter. For my parents, this was an opportunity to renew their role as a parent with me at home. As my parents aged, I spent all of my vacation time with my mother and father. We had time together that most adult children and parents do not have.

My parents attended my doctoral graduation ceremony, which they considered "impressive." I was still the daughter, who lived far away, and both were proud of my educational accomplishments, but neither were sure what I did at the university. When I stayed in their home, there were many lost opportunities for us to share our understandings and misunderstanding. Usually, we would sit quietly, watch television, or talk about very unimportant things like the weather. Consequently, a great deal went unsaid. The following describes real events:

Telephone Conversations

Mother answers:

Hello, there.

Doctor who?

Say what now?

For doctor who?

Doctor daughter.

Mother calls and asks me:

Now, dear, what do you do?

You teach college. Explain to me.

College students.

Do you like that?

Is it hard work?

Research classes.

Research papers.

Department work.

Do you like that?

Preparing.

Studying.

Planning.

Do you like that?

Well, ok, fine.

But, tell me again.

What do you do?

I found explaining my work difficult. I wanted to put this into words, but how? She wanted to understand, but just decided to accept what I said. We really did not pause long enough to find the words and understanding. I planned to find another way and another day to explain and describe my life and work, but that time did not happen.

I moved closer to home and not long after that my father suffered a heart attack, which was quickly followed by a second. My sister and I spent three weeks with him in the intensive care unit. I was glad to be there to hold his hand when he was frightened to sleep and feared he would not awake. Coping with anxiety, he would say, "I can't breathe. What is happening? I can't breathe." We would talk quietly and breathe together. I was glad to be there when he called out for water or just called my name. The intensive care unit does not provide such intensive, extensive care. At times my nephew and my mother

came to join our conversations, and encourage his recovery. I truly know that he is alive now because my sister and I stayed with him.

When he stabilized he moved to a unit of less intensive care, but we stayed with him. We talked about the past years: Dad as a student in school. Dad and Mom meeting and marrying. Children and children growing up. What my sister and I were like growing up. How his land meant so much to him. We finally talked about how much we loved each other. This truly was a celebration of life, a celebration of our life together. Such really important, deep sharing would not have happened if there had not been the time to stop our lives and if we had not realized that there might not be another chance.

When my father fell ill, my second semester at my new position was just beginning. The department chair said, "You should be there. Stay." Faculty members said the same. My classes were delayed, and later one became an on-line course. I remained with my father for two months: from hospital care and then to round the clock home care. I have no regrets. My professional life is in slow motion. I maintain contact with colleagues who are important to me, I read, and I try to write. I even do some presentations. I give my students all my telephone numbers, and they have called me at the hospital for answers or for support. This keeps me in touch with my work, while I continue to attend to what is really important, and my new priorities in life impact my professional one. I am finding time for important things, deciding what is important, and finding balance in my life. I am still the daughter who moved away, but always the one that cared and came home. Now the one who came back and to forge a new place within the family.

In my professional life, I am the faculty member who carefully schedules time to meet students, plan classes, complete assignments, and care for parents. I listen carefully and empathetically as students talk about similar situations. Many of my students are in the very same crisis situation with aging parents. We share common experiences and support each other personally, and then move to support each other's work professionally. The shared experiences provide an opening in our relationship that puts the student and myself at ease concerning our needs and priorities.

Forming and Reforming Identity

We each began our journeys to the professorate from different entry points. We both negotiate the sacred triad that defines a "professor": teaching, research, and service. However, as we illustrated in our stories, we each reshape and reinterpret that sacred triad in the context of our specific circumstances. The sacred triad defines *what* a professor is; our individual negotiations of that triad define *who* we are as professors. We form and reform our identities in practice (Wenger, 1998).

In sewing this pastiche, we have stitched together autobiographical and autoethnographical story, poetry, vignettes, and fiction to share the on-going and unpredictable dialogues we have held between our own potentialities and the life situations we found ourselves in (Shoenfeld & Magnan, 1994). These dialogues reflect how we have shaped, re-shaped, and are shaping our identities as professors. They also reflect how our human experiences seek and create meaning. The different forms (story, poetry, vignettes, fiction) reveal both how we have each chosen to translate our lives into text and how we are coming to know ourselves as assistant professors. They provide

snapshots of the passionate, intimate, unpredictable conversations we have held with ourselves and others during this pilgrimage (Whyte, 2001) towards becoming "one who professes." By weaving back and forth between our stories of personal experience, we reveal patterns of difference and similarity in our continuing exploration of the endless star called the "professorate."

By employing various forms and page layouts throughout this manuscript, we hope we have conveyed the complex, non-linear, and labyrinthine process of forming and re-forming identity while engaged in the practice of teaching, research and service.

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About Us

Karen E. Norum entered the professorate in 1997 at the University of South Dakota where she was an Assistant Professor of Technology for Training and Development, School of Education. Since August 2001, she has been an Assistant Professor of Adult and Organizational Learning at the University of Idaho, Boise. Her interests include arts-based research and experimenting with alternative forms of qualitative research. She can be reached at:

University of Idaho, Boise
College of Education
Boise, ID 83712
knorum@uidaho.edu
208/364-4028 (voice)
208/364-4035 (fax)

Sharon Spall currently teaches in leadership preparation at Western Kentucky University. Her research interests include leadership in small, rural schools, development of doctoral programs, and processes within forms of qualitative research. She can be reached at: (270)745-5190 or sharon.spall@wku.edu.